

S-E-C-R-E-T

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

26 October 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Reactions to Closing of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty

1. The two radios have been important instruments of influence in support of American policy. Their abandonment would not go unnoticed. Reactions in Europe would obviously vary widely among governments, sectors of opinion, and listening audiences in different countries. Elsewhere, the step would probably attract little or no interest, except in the United States.

2. Presumably it would be evident that the decision was made because the American government was embarrassed by disclosure of its covert support for these operations, and was unable to find another formula for providing such support. The reaction to this would be puzzlement, and it would be the one reaction common to interested opinion in both Eastern and Western Europe. Where the fact has not been actually known, covert American support has long been assumed in Europe and was not considered reprehensible.

GROUP 1  
Excluded from automatic  
downgrading and  
declassification

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

The oddity for Europeans would be that such activity by government should fall afoul of legalistic-moralistic criticism at all, and that an American administration could be forced by it to disavow a policy pursued for nearly two decades. Far from granting moral credit for the move, most European opinion would see it as reflecting a somewhat quaint approach to international politics.

Western Europe

3. The move would not occasion any great stir among Western European governments and opinion, however. Some would regret the loss of unique instruments of communication with Eastern Europe and the USSR, since the programming of these radios, particularly their commentary on internal developments in the Communist states, finds no parallel in the broadcasting activity of Western European states. Some would fear that the move was another symptom in a gradual process of American disengagement from Europe. Others, however, would welcome the development because they saw the radios as remnants of cold war, anomalous at a time when East-West relations were thought to be becoming more normal.

4. The matter would attract the most notice in West Germany, partly because it is host to the radios, and partly because the

- 2 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

political implications would seem the most significant there. German officials and informed opinion would have mixed feelings. The chronic suspicion of some sort of Soviet-American deal would be stimulated, as well as fears that withdrawal of the American presence from Europe had advanced another step. On the other hand, it would be recognized that at some stage, especially if the new German effort to normalize relations with Eastern Europe and the USSR should move ahead, the continued presence of RFE and RL could be an embarrassment. On balance, the Germans would probably conclude that they should accept the American decision without official demur.

5. The other host countries, Spain and Portugal, would similarly have mixed reactions. While they think of the radios as "anti-Communist" enterprises which they should support, this feeling is offset by a desire to manifest independence from the US. They would, however, be concerned by the loss of highly paid jobs and dollar earnings. Termination of the radios would have no lasting consequences for relations with these two countries.

6. There is one special group of people in Western Europe which would deeply regret the disappearance of the two institutions,

- 3 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

more especially RFE. These are journalists, scholars, and certain government officials with a professional interest in developments in Eastern Europe and the USSR. Such people welcome the broadcast effort to convey information and critical comment to the nations under Communist rule, considering that this effort plays a part in the political struggles which may bring evolutionary change to these societies. Further, the publications and research materials of the two establishments and the point of contact they provide with Eastern Europeans have been of great value to such persons. In turn, their influence through the press of Western Europe helps to maintain an informed opinion there. By those professionally concerned with Eastern Europe, knowledge of that area and communication links with it are regarded as significant for change in the Communist states and for the future of East-West relations.

Eastern Europe

7. Without doubt every government in Eastern Europe would welcome the demise of RFE. Most of these governments do not make an issue of its existence on the diplomatic plane, and one, Rumania, is even somewhat cooperative because it hopes through RFE to propagate its variant views among the other Communist states.

- 4 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

But all these regimes remain committed to totalitarian control and regard the intrusion of information and critical comment from outside sources as a threat. They have reason to fear, especially at times of internal crisis or when international developments stimulate antiregime or anti-Soviet sentiments, that RFE limits the control they seek to exercise through their own propaganda.

8. Oppositions exist in all the Eastern European states, even within the regimes. They aim at extending the process of internal liberalization and the assertion of national independence. Independent sources of information about developments within their own countries and on the international scene are vital to such groups. RFE has evidently been a principal source and has thus contributed to the political struggles within these countries in ways of interest to American policy. On a number of occasions RFE has been used by opposition groups to bring their views to public notice in their own countries. For such groups, the loss of RFE would be a discouraging setback. They would have little understanding for the considerations which led the American government to withdraw its support from the broadcasts. They would probably infer a loss of interest by American policy in that area.

- 5 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

USSR

9. The Soviet government would accept the termination of RFE and RL with pleasure, not only for political reasons but also because it maintains a jamming operation against RL considerably more costly than RL is to the US. The Soviets would probably be somewhat surprised also, especially since they have themselves within the last few years begun broadcasts (Radio Peace and Progress) which purport to be free of government control. In the present frosty climate of Soviet-American relations, however, Moscow could scarcely be expected to regard the move as a friendly gesture which it should reciprocate. More likely it would regard the development as a success to which Soviet propaganda had contributed. The issues of principle which concern the American government and public in connection with covert support of the two radios would be seen as ludicrous.

10. The number of Soviet citizens who regard Radio Liberty as a source of unbiased information is unknown. Unlike many Eastern Europeans, the Soviet people do not regard the Communist regime as alien, and political opposition does not have the scope and significance in the USSR that it has in most of Eastern Europe. There is evidence, however, that at moments of international crisis,

- 6 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

or when the regime takes particularly oppressive measures, Radio Liberty and other external media of communication play an important role in limiting the effectiveness of the Soviet propaganda apparatus. In the USSR, writers and other intellectuals are the groups most concerned to check the excesses of arbitrary Party control and to enlarge the area of freedom. Such groups would regard the termination of Radio Liberty, one of the sources on which they rely for information and contact with the West, as a loss to their cause. To them, too, the reasons for the move would be incomprehensible.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

25X1



SHERMAN KENT  
Chairman

- 7 -

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~